



GOING OUT IN FULL FORCE
Star Wars saga comes to an end **C1**



CHRISTMAS FUND
Chef sidelined by diabetes **A2**

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2019

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Mount Royal road unlikely to be one-way: Plante **A3**

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FOOD

Simple tomato salad tasty and festive **C3**



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\$2.61 Quebec City region

MORE ROOM TO LEARN

Wearing a Santa hat, Jenna Diona talks to Mina Woodruff on Tuesday at Edinburgh school in Montreal West. The students were in one of four modular classrooms installed this year to address overcrowding issues. **Katherine Wilton** has details. **A4**

Mount Royal tunnel's closing put off until spring

Price of REM will go up to \$6.5M though still on time, Caisse says

JASON MAGDER

The planned closure of the Mount Royal tunnel has been postponed by nearly three months, and its overall cost has increased.

On Tuesday afternoon, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec — the builder of the Réseau express métropolitain — announced it has modified the overall construction schedule of the light-rail network in an agreement with its partner NuovLR.

The new plan now calls for the century-old tunnel to close on March 30, rather than Jan. 6, as originally predicted.

However, the Caisse said it will make up for the lost time, as the tunnel is still slated to reopen

at the end of 2022, as originally scheduled. Construction began in 2018, and the network is set to be up and running in phases between 2021 and the end of 2023. The Caisse said the new agreement with NuovLR does not change the overall timetable for the project.

In a statement issued online, the Caisse announced the overall price of the project has now climbed to \$6.5 billion from the last prediction of \$6.3 billion. The scope of the project is to convert the Deux-Montagnes Line into a light-rail network and build new links to the airport, to Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue along Highway 40 and to the South Shore along the Champlain Bridge.

SEE TUNNEL ON **A6**

Inuit children at Batshaw can't go to English school

CHRISTOPHER CURTIS

"Part of the reason I am in placement is that I was not attending school. So they send me here, and I am not allowed to go to school."

This Inuit child skips class so often that their behaviour is flagged by a youth protection worker who decides it's best to take them from their family and put them on a southbound plane to live in a Montreal group home.

But once the child is outside of Nunavik, they're no longer eligible to attend high school in English. So they spend their days in the group home, with other Inuit teenagers and a tutor who tries to keep them up to date with schoolwork.

The child described this experience and is quoted in a report presented to Batshaw Youth Services in May.

The report was recently obtained by the Montreal Gazette.

The document also found that the number of Inuit children placed in state care is overwhelming the system, that most children cannot say why they're at a Batshaw facility and that when they finally age out of their group home,

they'll be "unprepared for life as an independent adult."

Leigh Johnston, the report's author, interviewed nine Inuit teenagers in March to determine how they're faring in the youth protection system. Only two of them were attending high school at the time because of a major bureaucratic oversight.

Kids in Quebec's sprawling north attend schools overseen by the Kativik Iilisariliriniq school board instead of the Education Ministry. As such, students in Nunavik don't, for instance, require English Eligibility Certificates to attend school in English.

So when they come south without the document, provincial law prohibits English schools from admitting them, effectively depriving Inuit from access to the same education as non-Indigenous children.

Inuit children speak Inuktitut as their first language, English as their second and French as their third — making the prospect of going to high school in French an additional and unnecessary challenge to their development, according to the report.

SEE CHLD ON **A7**



Teacher Gurpreet Kaur's heart sank when she was assigned to work with students, including Valentina Amaru, in a modular classroom, but she admits she's overjoyed with the quality of the educational space. JOHN KENNEDY

Modular classrooms solve school's overcrowding issue

Students and parents sold on spacious, ventilated and well-lit prefab units

KATHERINE WILTON

Gurpreet Kaur was thrilled to be starting a new teaching job at Edinburg School in Montreal West in September. But when the principal told her that she would be assigned to a modular classroom, her heart sank.

Kaur knew little about modern prefabricated classrooms and feared she and her students would be stuck in a trailer that was cold, damp and miserable.

"I was panicked," she recalled. "I was worried I was going to be in an (old) trailer separate from the school."

The principal assured her that today's mobile classrooms are spacious and heated and would be attached to the main school building. So when Kaur and her students saw the four modular classrooms that were installed this fall to solve overcrowding problems, they were overjoyed.

"We were jumping out of our boots," said eight-year-old Jacqueline Sidel, whose Grade 3 class uses one of the units.

On Tuesday, the French immersion elementary school officially inaugurated the prefabricated classrooms, the first ones installed in English Montreal School Board schools.

Edinburg's official capacity is 330, but 400 students were crowded into the school last year.

To deal with the space crunch, the school cut its library space in half, held music classes on a stage in the gym, and the science teacher walked from class to class pushing a cart full of experiments.

With siblings getting priority

and the school's popularity growing, fewer spots were available in kindergarten over the past two years. Only 12 spots were available for the 2018-19 school year, 17 this school year.

One child, who lives across the street from Edinburg on Hudson Ave., had to be bused to Willingdon School in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

Parents desperate to secure a coveted spot began waiting outside two days before registration last winter — something parents at Royal Vale School have been doing for 30 years.

Edinburg's governing board had been trying to avoid such a scenario and began working with the EMSB to find more space. It had suggested taking over Adolphe-Tanquerelle School, a seven-minute walk away in Côte St-Luc, but the school board felt the at-risk high school students attending that school needed their own building.

The board suggested that Edinburg open a junior campus in a former elementary school on Coronation Ave. in N.D.G. But many parents felt that the school was too far away and feared Edinburg would lose its close-knit community.

That's when governing board chairperson Michael Rodger wondered if modular classrooms could be a solution. In his professional life, Rodger has worked with mining companies that use the modular units as offices on site.

"They're good enough for executives to have meetings in and they're good enough to have students learn in," he said. "They have far exceeded our expectations and they have solved our

overcrowding problem."

The four new classrooms, which house two classes, a fitness room and a resource room, have transformed the school, say students, parents and teachers. The 800-square-foot units respect the same quality standards in terms of insulation, ventilation and light as houses. The EMSB paid \$600,000 to rent the classrooms and have them installed.

Grade 6 students Cecilia Samayoa and Ella Joy Langlois-Aalmanian said the new classrooms make the school feel less crowded. "We have a science room now and can do experiments, and when it's raining, we can go to the fitness room," Ella said.

Rodger praised the EMSB for acting promptly to resolve the overcrowding problem.

Meanwhile, students presented the board's director general, Ann Marie Matheson, with a thank-you card on Tuesday. "We wanted to make sure the students had the best learning environment and teachers had the best teaching environment," Matheson said.

Parent Caroline Phaneuf said the new science class has motivated her nine-year-old daughter to work harder this year.

"My daughter was struggling in science and now she's getting 90s," she said.

Abdel El Hama, the science teacher who had to push his cart from class to class last year, was beaming as he showed off his classroom. The spacious room, which houses a 3D printer and robotics equipment, is so popular that between 10-20 students turn up at lunch hour to do robotics.

"There are so many. I have to draw numbers," he said. "It's fantastic."

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'Really surreal': Quebec directors react to landing on Oscar shortlists

T'CHA DUNLEVY

You know your day can only get better when you start off by getting run over by an Uber Eats bicycle.

Montrealer Theodore Ushev was out for his morning jog Monday in Paris when the incident occurred. He emerged relatively unscathed, and by evening his NFB-produced film *The Physics of Sorrow* had been shortlisted in the Oscar category of best animated short.

"I still cannot realize if it's real or not," he said, reached on his cellphone shortly after the news broke. It was past midnight for Ushev, but he had already written off sleeping.

Fellow Montrealer Meryam Joobeur was in her family's hometown, Seyda, Tunisia, when she learned her film *Brotherhood* had made the shortlist for best live action short. She, too, was having trouble processing her good fortune.

"It's really surreal," Joobeur said. "I feel like the whole journey of this film is very surreal. When I was making the film, my only intention was to be able to show it to the community who helped make it. I didn't think about how it would impact others. The fact that it has gone this far is pretty crazy, to tell you the truth."

Ushev and Joobeur are now halfway to the Oscars. *The Physics of Sorrow* and *Brotherhood* were culled from pools of 92 films and 191 films, respectively, to reach their respective 10-title shortlists. Each now has a 50-50 chance of ending up in the group of five nominees in their respective categories.

Ushev has been here before. His eight-minute film *Blind Vaysha* was nominated for an Oscar in 2016.

"That year, we lost to Pixar," he said. "Luckily this year Pixar didn't make it, so we are going to lose to someone else."

Jokes aside, his previous Oscar experience didn't make the wait any easier.

"This year, I felt like it was much more difficult, because this film is much more personal," Ushev said. A brooding exploration of love, loss and the meaning of home, *The Physics of Sorrow* is the first animated film made using the encaustic painting technique. Ushev, a Bulgarian immigrant who came to Quebec in 1999, says it's dedicated to his father, who died in December 2018.

Fittingly, he recruited another father-son team for the project. The filmmaker convinced Rossif Sutherland to lend his striking baritone to the film, and Sutherland in turn convinced his father, Donald, to contribute a secondary voice-over.

Launched at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, *The Physics of Sorrow* has been racking up the accolades since.

"Up to now, it has won 16 (festival) prizes in only three months," Ushev said. "It's going extremely well."

There's still a way to go before the Oscar nominations are announced Jan. 13, and Ushev isn't getting ahead of himself.

"No one knows what's going to happen," he said, "but I'll be very happy if we end up speaking again in a month."

Monday was a doubly good day for Joobeur. Only a few hours before the Oscar shortlist announcements, Quebec funding agency SODEC announced that her feature film *Motherhood* was among the new projects it had chosen to support.

Joobeur was in Tunisia doing research for *Motherhood*, which is based on *Brotherhood's* dramatic tale of a Muslim couple in the Tunisian countryside who must adapt to the return of one of their sons from fighting in Syria.

The film has screened at 150 festivals in 48 countries, winning 63 prizes since its premiere at TIFF in September 2018, where it was named best Canadian short.

For Joobeur, all the accolades are confirmation that she's on the right path.

"Going into *Brotherhood*, I decided to change my way of approaching filmmaking," she said. "I decided to listen to my instincts, to let go of any pressures I had regarding success or festival acceptance, and just enjoy the process."

It's potentially the second straight Oscar nomination for *Brotherhood* co-producer Maria Gracia Turgeon, who also produced Jeremy Comte's *Faune*, one of two Quebec films nominated for best live action short at the 2019 Academy Awards.

"Firstly, it's due to the fact that both *Faune* and *Brotherhood* are wonderful films," said Turgeon, who is also working with Joobeur on *Motherhood*.

The two spoke Monday night. "It's a lot of excitement," Turgeon said. "We were trying not to think about it, and to say it probably won't happen so we didn't have expectations. But when the news finally comes, it's hard not to be excited."

There is one other NFB co-produced film in the animated short category: Portuguese filmmaker Regina Pessoa's *Uncle Thomas: Accounting for the Days*.

Montrealer Paul Cadieux, of *Filmnotion International*, also had cause to celebrate, as Rachel Leah Jones and Philippe Bellaïche's film *Advocate*, a film he co-produced about Israeli human rights lawyer Lea Tsemel, was shortlisted for best documentary feature.

The 92nd Academy Awards take place Feb. 9. tdunlevy@postmedia.com
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Montreal filmmaker Theodore Ushev's *The Physics of Sorrow* has been shortlisted in the Oscar category of best animated short film. NFB

IN BRIEF

Airport refuelling staff threaten strike

Operations at Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau and Montréal-Mirabel could be disrupted beginning Christmas Day by a strike by employees whose duties include refuelling aircraft. Without a contract since August, workers with Swissport Canada, represented by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers on Tuesday threatened a walkout on Dec. 25. The union is in contract talks that are currently at the mediation stage, but wants a settlement. Salaries and working conditions are the main sticking points. The union says Swissport Canada is the only supplier of fuel for airlines flying out of either installation.

The employees covered by the strike mandate are machinists and refuelling personnel.

In case of a strike, Swissport Canada would have to resort to using management personnel to maintain operations, but they would be insufficient to meet the demands of regular air traffic, the union said. Airports de Montréal, which administers both airports, has yet to react to the union's announcement.

Police confirm triple-murder-suicide

Montreal police confirmed on Tuesday that the deaths of a Fainte-aux-Trembles mother and her two boys last week was a triple-murder-suicide. On the morning of Dec. 11, police found the bodies of 42-year-old Dahlia Kellaf and her sons in their home on Pointe-aux-Lièvres St. The night before, the boys' father, Nabil Yssaad, killed himself

after reportedly jumping from the sixth floor of a hospital in Joliette. Police had showed up at the house to inform the family of Yssaad's suicide when they made the horrific discovery. Investigators ordered autopsies of the mother and the boys, ages two and four. "As a result of the autopsies, we were able to link the homicides with the man who killed himself in Joliette," said Constable Jean-Pierre Brabant of the Montreal Police Department. Brabant declined to provide more details of the circumstances surrounding the slayings. "There are still elements that need to be looked at in the investigation," he added. In the days before the killings, he had signed a peace bond promising to keep good behaviour and to stay at least 100 metres away from Kellaf, except to see his children. For the last two years, he had been living at two different addresses in St-Léonard.

DRAW RESULTS - MONDAY DECEMBER 16 2019

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